

Opening Speech
by
HE Mr. Pongol Adireksam
Minister of Education, Thailand
Chairman of the Education Council
to
The Third International Forum on Education Reform Education Decentralization
Revisited: School-based Management
Monday 8 September 2003, 1630 hrs
The Ambassador Hotel, Bangkok

Dr. Rung Kaewdang Secretary- General of the Education Council
and Chairman of the Forum's Organizing Committee,

Dr. Zhou Nan-zhao, UNESCO Bangkok,

Professor Dr. Brian Caldwell, Dean, Faculty of Education, University of
Melbourne, Australia,

Forum participants,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great privilege to join you this afternoon in the opening ceremony of the Third International Forum on Education Reform: "Education Decentralization Revisited: School-based Management" for two reasons. First, it is a pleasure to welcome all forum participants who have been tirelessly supporting education reform in Thailand and 27 other countries represented here. For those of you who came from overseas, I, on behalf of the Royal Thai Government, sincerely hope that your five or more-day stay in Thailand will provide you not only fruitful thoughts, but also delightful acquaintance to Thai hospitality and our enriched culture.

Secondly, it is also a pleasure to share with you today significant progress of education reform in Thailand. As you may observe from the video presentation, people from all walks of life in Thailand equally deserve to pursue their dreams and materialize them through better education and lifelong learning.

Dr. Thaksin Shinawatra, our Prime Minister, has stated in many occasions that this government will use education as the most important tool to alleviate the standard of life of our people. As such, initiatives to reform our education, which I believe are in line with many other countries, have to be consistent with the government's policy by emphasizing learners' skills in thinking, analyzing, criticizing, and problem-solving through various educational activities.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight some of our major accomplishments in education reform. Quantitatively speaking, 97 percent of the children at the age of 6-15 years old already got access to 9 year compulsory education. Along with this track, the handicapped, those who need special care, and the poor are entitled to be additionally subsidized to acquire greater chance to receive appropriate education according to their needs.

At the classroom level, the learning boundary, once limited by a traditional teacher-oriented approach, has been considerably liberated with various learning techniques to better suit learners' as well as community's needs. As in the video clip, the new curriculum allows community members and parents to work closely with teachers to ensure that learning activities will be facilitated in line with actual local contexts.

As of the seventh of July this year, we have accomplished the consolidation of three educational agencies, namely the Ministry of Education, Ministry of University Affairs, and Office of the National Education Commission to form the new Ministry of Education. Such consolidation is based on the principle of unity in policy and diversity in implementation as well as decentralization of authority to educational service areas, educational institutions and local administration organizations.

In each educational service area, there is an Area Committee for Education comprising representatives from stakeholders. The Area Committee for Education is responsible for promoting and supporting education in each area to meet the national education goals and standard. At the school level, there is also a school board taking charge of the academic and administrative tasks of the school. Following the principle of decentralization of authority to educational institutions, the school-based management approach has been implemented together with financial auditing as well as monitoring and evaluation of academic performance.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As the Minister of Education, I have spent considerable time travelling to more than 40 provinces nationwide to observe school innovations under the reform efforts. From my observation, I am convinced that decentralization could empower schools to exercise their autonomy in at least four areas: the setting up of school vision, the learning reform and design of school curriculum, the school-based personnel development and school accountability.

School autonomy enables school personnel, community leaders, parents, and students in each school to collaboratively share vision of learning and design its own school charter as a road map for its educational operation.

School autonomy will enable schools to design their own curriculum and learning activities, reflecting the needs and context of each community. Along the same line, the Ministry of Education has initiated five models of schools namely State-Supervised School, Bilingual School, School for the Gifted, Buddhism-Oriented School, and Model ICT School with the hope that schools in Thailand will develop their own identity according to their context.

School autonomy allows schools to initiate school-based training to ensure that every teacher has an opportunity for their professional development and capacity building. In this regard, the Government will invest a significant proportion of next year's budget on the personnel capacity building for the whole-school reform as well

as transforming traditional schools to local learning centers connected with the Internet and sources of information.

Alongside the school autonomy, a self-directed internal evaluation supervised by school boards as well as friendly-oriented external assessment by the Office for the Educational Standards and Quality Assessment are the dual track that Thailand will follow in order to increase school effectiveness as well as accountability in many years to come.

To conclude my speech, ladies and gentlemen, I sincerely hope that all participants will use this gathering to share your experience and ideas on the implementation of School-based Management. I now officially declare open the Third International Forum on Education Reform: Education Decentralization Revisited: School-based Management and wish the forum and all participants every success.

Thank you for your kind attention.